

O N D R U M S

Trouble-Free Drums

You'll have enough headaches on the road without creating your own.

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THE PHONE RINGS, and it's a booking agent telling you he's booked a six-nighter for your group at a small club 100 miles away. While everyone in the band scrambles to attend to their own affairs, the drummer too must think about his own equipment. So, let's talk about what you'll need when you're on the road to insure headache-free performances.

The No.1 priority for all drums is *cases*. The extra-

heavy-duty ATA cases you see with touring bands are great if you plan to fly and your equipment is to be loaded into the belly of a 707. If you own delicate electronics, such as electronic drum brains, drum machines, and PA gear, then you might want to look into the ATA-style cases available.

Rather than deal with separate cases for my arsenal of drum synths, effects, midi converters and so on, I've chosen to mount them all into a rack road case, with a rack-mountable power outlet box. Everything is right there in the case, ready to go once the covers are removed. There are also light-weight versions of the ATA cases, which use thinner plywood.

For most types of highway travel, fiber cases will work out fine. Many companies make fiber cases, including Anvil, Calzone, Humes & Berg, and Bobadilla. There are also companies that make hi-impact molded plastic cases (such as Impact), and padded bags (such as Beato) which are good for local gigs. Foam lining is a plus — it pads your drums from external shocks, such as banging around together in the back of the van.

One recommendation: Don't ever leave your drums in the back seat of a car in hot weather. I've seen some horrible drum-mutants come out of their cases after sitting in a car all day in 90-degree heat and direct sunlight. The plastic covering on the shells softens and creates ripples in the finish where it pulls away from the shell itself, and this, cannot be repaired (except by totally re-covering the drum).

Another important consid-

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eration is spare parts. Imagine playing a week-long gig in a small town — you break a snare head the first night, and the nearest music shop is two hours away. When I go out for travel gigs, each of my drum cases carries an extra drum-head. The expense of carrying a complete second set of heads is minimal if you compare it to the aggravation involved if you *don't* have them.

Some drummers like to carry a spare snare drum. At the very least carry a spare snare drum batter head, bottom snare head, and a bass drum head. They don't necessarily have to be brand-new. In a pinch, the bottom tomtom head can replace the top batter head — of course, this will only work if your toms are double-headed in the first place.

For any gig, on the road or local, I bring a fishing tackle box full of all sorts of drum parts "just in case," such as snare cords, an extra set of wire snares, tension rods and washers, wing nuts for cymbal stands, wing screws for stands and holders, cymbal felts, pedal straps, an extra hi-hat clutch, drum keys, and allen wrenches.

A few other spares to consider would be external mufflers in case you have to

dampen your kit to suit a particular room's acoustics, and an assortment of pedal beaters, again to modify your bass drum sound for a certain room. If you play electronic drums, be sure to carry extra cables, and extra fuses for the brain.

Before you leave for the gig, load up your stick bag with your preferred sticks. Just as your guitarist couldn't go to a gig with only one pick, you shouldn't arrive with only one pair of drumsticks.

One last thing I've found to be a life-saver at times is a rug. There are many different floor surfaces you'll be expected to set up on. If you encounter a polished wood floor, having a rug underneath your drumkit will keep it from sliding forward and away from you. Any local carpet store will sell you odd-sized remnants at a decent price.

No matter what type of music you play, be it rock, metal, jazz, country, whatever, having trouble-free equipment helps make for trouble-free performances.

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